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Karl Marx and Moses Hess

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NO ACCOUNT of the intellectual development of Marx would be complete unless it considered Marx's relationship to an Influential group of German radical thinkers who called themselves "true" or "philosophical" communists. So important and dangerous did Marx regard their views that for years both he and Engels carried on a fierce polemic against them in the radical periodicals of the time. This was brought to a climax and finish in the special section of the **Communist Manifesto** devoted to *Der deutsche oder der wahre Sozialismus* (IIIc) in which after a short summary and refutation of their views, Marx accused the "true" socialists of being allies of the feudal reaction.

The understanding of the situation is complicated by the fact that the leading figures of "true socialism" stood closer to Marx and Engels than any other radical German group in the '40's. We know that Moses Hess, the chief theoretician of the movement, converted Engels to communism, and Zlocisti, Hess' biographer, claims that Hess was not without influence on Marx, too. More interesting is the fact that Hess collaborated with Marx in writing **Die deutsche Ideologie** (1845); part of the manuscript is in his handwriting. Hess was also an ally of Marx in his struggles against Bruno Bauer, Ruge, Stirner, and Feuerbach. After the first critical writings of Marx and Engels against "true socialism" appeared, Hess avowed himself convinced by their arguments, forswore his past literary habits and plunged into a study of political economy (Letter to Marx, July 28, 1846). His essay - *Die Folgen der Revolution des Proletariats* (1847) - published before the **Communist Manifesto** was written, is Marxian in tone and analysis, save on some organizational issues. Yet the **Communist Manifesto** published early in 1848 unmistakably concentrates its fire on Hess, making allowances neither for the actual development of Hess' views nor for his revolutionary integrity.

Another factor which has made it difficult for some to understand Marx's criticism is the general acknowledgment that, personally, Moses Hess was a man of singular purity of character. He was sensitive to every form of injustice, passionate in his devotion to principles, and almost saintly in his everyday behavior. He was unable to hate even those who had harmed him. Although subjected to a life-long poverty, even more grinding than that of Marx, he never wavered in his allegiance to revolutionary ideals. He was very active in the First International where he joined forces with Marx against Bakunin. Early in life he broke away from his orthodox Jewish home and married a prostitute - "in order to atone for the evil society had done" - with whom he lived in happy marriage until his death. His friends nicknamed him "the communist rabbi".

Both the vehemence and justice of Marx's denunciation of the "true socialists" have been challenged by students of the period. Koigen, Hammacher, and Zlocisti [\[1\]](#) have maintained that Marx himself was at one time a "true socialist" (about Engels' "philosophical socialism" there is no question at all), and that historically there is no more justification for believing Hess to be a precursor of Marxism than for accepting Marx' characterization of him.

Mehring, Bernstein, and G. Meyer [2] do not maintain that Marx was a “true socialist” but they are unequivocal in stating that Marx and Engels did less than justice to “true socialism” in general and to Hess in particular. Riazanov takes a middle ground; but Lukacs [3] defends Marx in every particular and even asserts that far from being a “true socialist”, Marx was not even a genuine Feuerbachian.

For our purpose it is immaterial whether Marx was a “true socialist” or whether Hess was a forerunner of Marx. That they shared a great many positions together is indicated by their common derivation from Hegel and Feuerbach on the one hand, and their common struggles against other oppositional tendencies on the other. More important are the differences which manifest themselves between them. Even if it should turn out that Marx was a “true socialist” and that the views he argued against were those that he himself had earlier embraced, it would still be necessary, in tracing Marx’s intellectual biography, to consider his criticism of “true socialism” as self-criticism.

I The Philosophy of Moses Hess

“In Frankreich vertritt das Proletariat, in Deutschland des Geistesaristokratie den Humanismus.”
– HESS.

“True socialism” was a pseudo-political tendency among a certain group of literary men, publicists and philosophers in Germany, all of whom had been influenced by Feuerbach. It was not a system of thought. In a sense, every “true socialist” had his own philosophy. Hess, Grün, Lüning, Kriege, Heinzen, each developed his position in his own way so that no general exposition can be an adequate account of all the “true socialists”. If one must choose a representative of this tendency, there is no choice but to turn to Moses Hess. He was the recognized leader of the group. By virtue of his unremitting activity in behalf of revolutionary ideals, he had already won the title of the “father of German communism”. Unfortunately, the philosophy of Hess is not a unified doctrine. It is futile to look for system or consistency in it. Hess was by turns a Spinozist, an Hegelian, a Feuerbachian, a Marxist, a natural science monist, and a combination of them all. It will therefore be necessary to select for exposition only those of his views which Hess held in the Forties and which were in large measure shared by his “true socialist” comrades. Marx’s criticisms will then be more intelligible.

1. *The Social Status of the German Intellectual.* It was Heine who first proclaimed that the Germans had succeeded in doing only in thought what others had already done in fact. This was a pointed way of saying that although the Germans were lagging behind other western nations in their social and political development, their philosophical theory from Kant to Hegel had already given an adequate ideological expression of the needs and ideals of bourgeois society. In Germany proper, however, the bourgeoisie had not yet come to power and the class relationships were obscured by a host of traditional, religious, sectional and political factors. The country was predominantly agricultural; the semi-feudal estates provided a food supply sufficient not only for the domestic market but for export. Political power was largely concentrated in the hands of the nobility. This power had been challenged by Napoleon in two ways. First, by a direct attempt to introduce democratic and constitutional customs in those parts of Germany which he had conquered; and second, by the indirect effects of the imposition of the Continental system, which by barring English manufacturers from Germany called into existence a German industrial class (*cf.* Engels, *Der Status Quo in Deutschland*, **Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe**, Sec. I, Vol. 6, p. 231*ff.*). With Napoleon’s defeat the first danger was removed – (except for the *promise* of a constitution which the Prussian King had made in order to spur his subjects on against the invader). But the second danger remained. The German bourgeoisie which had grown strong enough to dominate the domestic market during the Napoleonic wars, continued to grow. Manufacturing, mining and shipping were developed on a wider scale. The bourgeoisie demanded

a tariff-union (*Zollverein*) for all the thirty-nine German states and got it. It demanded a protective tariff for Prussia, and got that too. At every step, however, it encountered the opposition of the landed feudal interests whose wealth and power had been adversely affected, first, by the Napoleonic wars which had closed the French and English markets, second, by the English Corn Laws, enacted after the restoration of peace, and third, by overseas competition in agricultural and grazing products. The struggle between the rising bourgeoisie and the nobility was mediated by the monarchy which tolerated the bourgeoisie because it increased the national wealth and supplied new sources of revenue. Politically, however, the monarchy favored the landed nobility because it feared that the development of industry would force the surrender of absolutism and accelerate the national unification of Germany. Meanwhile, the consequences of the agrarian reforms of Stein had increased the number of independent peasant-proprietors who, together with the local hand-workers, small tradesmen, etc., constituted a class of petty bourgeoisie. Its interests were as much opposed to the large landlords as to the industrial capitalist. A small, inarticulate and newly created class of proletarians, which accompanied the growth of industry, suffered an intensive exploitation that often takes place when a country is first opened to manufacture.

In this confused social and political scene, government was possible only with the help of a great bureaucracy of officials who administered the complicated laws and regulations which grew out of the conflicts of so many different interests. In the course of time the bureaucracy began to consider itself an independent class with independent interests. But since by training and origin it was feudal in outlook, it was unsympathetic to the bourgeoisie. With growing resentment the latter found that the red tape, and the bribery necessary to break it, were interfering with normal industrial expansion and adding to the costs of production. Its economic interests demanded the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, but it was itself so strongly infected with the semi-feudal *Staat-und Ständesphilosophie* that it preferred to truckle to the nobility and bureaucracy rather than to risk an open fight. Its only possible allies were the proletariat and a part of the petty bourgeoisie. The first was too weak, and the second – in Germany – more royalist than the king. And so the German bourgeoisie hoped to win its much needed reforms not by open class struggle but by (1) involving the nobility in the net of its investment schemes, (2) by making the government dependent upon it for its finances, and (3) by petitioning the king and his bureaucracy for a liberal constitution in the name of “social progress”, “humanitarianism”, and “philosophy”.

It is against this background that the “true socialism” of the radical German intellectuals must be understood. They were acquainted with the great French socialist writers without having acquired a clear insight into the class stratification of their own country or a consciousness of the specific needs of the proletariat as a class. [4] As a group the intellectuals could only function either by direct or indirect service with the bureaucracy – which meant going over to outright reaction – or by expressing the demands of an opposition class. In the Thirties the Young Germans and the Young Hegelians had frankly adopted the point of view of the German bourgeoisie and had agitated for all the constitutional rights which England and France were enjoying. But with the disintegration of these schools of thought and with the dissemination of French socialist ideas, the German intellectuals lost their enthusiasm for the bourgeoisie. Instead of continuing with them in a common struggle against the absolutist monarchy, they turned all their weapons against bourgeois culture and politics, criticizing the social consequences of industrial production. In their most advanced phase they spoke in the name of the proletariat, but the only proletarians they knew were the ones talked about by the French Socialist writers. Or what was even more confusing, they sometimes proclaimed that “*Das Proletariat ist die Menschheit*” (the proletariat is humanity) so that it would appear, as Marx once caustically observed, that in struggling to abolish classes, the communists were striving to destroy humanity.

In fact, whatever revolutionary consciousness developed among the German intellectuals took place quite independently of the development of the German proletariat. Hess was not only unacquainted with the German working classes, he was even unaware of the existence of communistic groups among the German workers in Paris. “When I came to Paris,” he writes, “I was no more aware of the existence of communistic groups of German journeymen than they were of me.” (**Sozialistische Aufsätze**, ed. by Zlocisti, p. 122) And Engels in one of his letters to

Marx, writing of the great interest in communism which he and Hess had succeeded in awakening by public meetings, admits that they were winning converts among all classes except the proletariat.

"All of Elberfeld and Barmen, from the money aristocracy to the *épicerie*, was represented. Only the proletariat was not there ... Things are going fine. Everyone is talking about communism, and we are winning new followers every day. Wuppertaler communism is *une vérité*, yes, almost a force ... The dumbest, most indolent and philistine of people who are interested in nothing in the world are beginning to become enthusiastic [*schwärmen*] about communism." (**Gesamtausgabe**, Sec. III, Vol. 2, p. 14.)

Engels, himself, had already perceived the limitations of a theory of communism which took its point of departure from abstract ethical principles without relating them to the concrete struggles of the working class. In the preface to his **Condition of the English Working Class** (1845) he admits that one of the aims of his book is to put an end to all communist "*Phantastereien und Schwärmereien pro et contra*" and to provide a factual analysis of the economic realities which were shaping the social destinies of the proletariat and determining the conditions of their emancipation. The majority of the radical German intellectuals, however, were insensitive to the existence and importance of social class divisions. Imbued with the ideals of a *perfect* society; they were unable to join the bureaucracy which administered *present* society. They also refused to make themselves a vehicle for the specific temporal demands of the bourgeoisie or proletariat. The only standpoint from which they passed criticism upon society was an allegedly classless ethics whose values expressed not the immediate need of this or that class but the *essential* needs of the whole of society. They felt themselves to be the prophets of the good society whose organization could be deduced from the "true nature" of man. They were concerned with the sufferings of the proletariat and the disparity which existed between their present life and their life as it ought to be. But they had no conception of what constituted the proletariat. The proletariat was identified with an abstract category of distress. The "true socialists" sympathized with the proletariat as they would sympathize with the cause of any underdog. They claimed to be socialists as much for the sake of the *ultimate* welfare of the nobility and bourgeoisie as for the sake of those whom these classes oppressed.

It should now be clear why such a position tended to strengthen the belief that it was possible to find an objective social philosophy which was valid for all classes of society.

2. *Communism as Humanism*. The philosophy of Hess was born of a desire to find fundamental principles of social organization which would make possible the elimination of all conflict between man and man, and class and class. Early in his career, as a follower of Spinoza and Hegel, he believed that valid principles of social order could be derived only from a knowledge of the metaphysical structure of existence. The good life is a life based upon the insight into the unity and necessity of all things. Virtue arises from the *knowledge* of our status and function in the all-embracing totality - called by both Spinoza and Hegel, God. Two difficulties, however, compelled Hess to modify his original Spinozism. First, its contemplative outlook upon life conflicted with his *consciousness* that a great many things had to be done, that problems were pressing for a solution which could not be found by viewing them *sub specie aeternitatis*. Secondly, a consistent Spinozism and Hegelianism seemed to imply that in the complete vision of the order and connection of things, everything was blessed with necessity, and that evil was non-existent. This would call into question the very reality of the social problems of evil and oppression which irked Hess' sensitive nature and which had furnished the starting point of his whole philosophical enquiry. The practical upshot of this philosophical ethics was to identify religion with morality and to make the problems of daily life which confronted him, unimportant and unreal.

Hess' task was now to find a philosophy which would justify the autonomy of moral *activity*. Like most of the YoungHegelians, Hess turned to Fichte. The active personality of Fichte, his early enthusiasm for the French Revolution, and his apparent social and political liberalism had initiated a kind of Fichte Renaissance among the Young-Hegelians. Since it was from him that

Hegel had taken over and developed the dialectical method, the Young-Hegelians could with good philosophical grace couple their allegiance to the hero of the *Atheismusstreit* with their school loyalty to Hegel, the philosopher of the restoration. About the same time that Hess was writing his pieces in the **Rheinische Zeitung** and his essay, *Philosophie der Tat*, Koppen, the close friend of Marx, published an article on *Fichte und die Revolution* in which he declared:

“Now that the impulse to free political development has again come to life in us Germans ... the voice of the purest, most determined, and strongest character among German philosophers will be better understood and will find a readier reception than ever before.” [5]

Hess, however, was more interested in grafting Fichte’s metaphysics of activity upon Spinoza’s doctrine of substance (something which Hegel had already done) than in Fichte’s explicit political doctrines.

“Not being but action is first and last ... Now is the time for the philosophy of spirit to become a philosophy of activity. Not only thinking but the whole of human activity must be lifted to a plane on which all oppositions disappear ... Fichte in this respect has already gone further than the most recent philosopher.” (*Philosophie der Tat*, **Sozialistische Aufsätze**, p. 37, p. 50)

In invoking the Fichtean principle of activity to supplement the Spinozistic doctrine of Substance, Hess was expressing in an esoteric way the conflict which he had already described in more popular fashion as the conflict between religion and morality. The religious outlook, he contended, was essentially one of acceptance – an acceptance of the order of the universe, whether it be called God, Nature, Reason, or Spirit, of which human beings were a part, and whose mysterious and purposive ways could only be dimly apprehended by faith and intelligence. The standpoint of morality, on the other hand, was one of assertion – an assertion of what ought to be and what is not, an imposition of a new order and not merely the recognition of an old. The root of religion was man’s feelings; the source of morality was the practical necessities of life. So long as human beings strive after ideals of perfection, there can be no completely irreligious men; so long as they live in society, they cannot be completely immoral. Irreligion is simply a word for other people’s religion; immorality, a term for behavior different from our own. The essence of religion is *worship*; the essence of morality, *conscientiousness*. (*Religion und Sittlichkeit*, **ibid.**, p. 28)

The conflict between religion and morality, Hess went on to say, can only be avoided if both observed a proper division, of labor. Religion had no business in politics or with the concerns of the state. It is a private matter – an affair of the individual soul faced by the immensities of the cosmos. The field of politics belongs to ethics; its object is the general interests of mankind.

“Let religion educate, edify, and elevate the *individual soul*. Let it support the weak and console the suffering. But in public life let man show himself not in his individual but in his general character. Public life – the state – demands not weak but strong, courageous and independent men.”

But now Hess found himself confronted by even greater difficulties. If religion could not serve as a basis for social peace, how could ethics take its place? In affirming the Fichtean principle of activity, Hess was subscribing to the view that individuality is a brute metaphysical fact. Principles cannot act in time and be acted upon; only individuals can. In the social field, individuality expresses itself in the different personalities whose relationships constitute the social order. But, if virtue be no more than *conscientiousness*, if each individual is to fulfill the law of his own nature, what is the guarantee that social peace and freedom can be secured? Hess is asking how genuine social morality is possible. A social morality based upon convention or contact between personalities breaks down as soon as an individual or a group becomes sufficiently powerful to violate the compact with impunity. A social morality based on authority or revelation is compatible with the autonomy of moral action. Yet a social morality *must be grounded on some objective order*. It cannot be the order of nature. And at this point, Hess turns to Feuerbach. Morality must be grounded on the “true” nature of the human species – on Man viewed not as a series of isolated individuals or as one abstract universal – Humanity – but as a

living unity whose different parts have developed from a common source and which are bound together by a feeling of natural kinship. But man cannot live as man – and here Hess improves on Feuerbach – unless he recognizes that his human needs require new institutions; that all the social and political conflicts of the past and present have grown out of the root evils of private property; that money plays the same role in distorting man's practical life that religion plays in distorting his intellectual life. Having read Proudhon and the Utopian French socialists, Hess tries to link up their conclusions with Feuerbach's method:

"The essence of God, says Feuerbach, is the transcendent essence of man, and the real theory of the divine nature is the theory of human nature. Theology is *anthropology*. That is the truth, but it is not the *whole* truth. The nature of man, it must be added, is social, involving the cooperative activity of all individuals for the same ends and interests. The true theory of man, the true humanism is the theory of *human society*. In other words, *anthropology is socialism*." (Loc. cit., pp. 115-116)

The logical corollary of this position was that the struggle for human freedom and social security must be waged not in the name of the proletariat, but in the name of humanity.

3. *Communism as the Ethics of Love*. The specific content with which Hess filled this abstract humanism is not hard to guess. It was a variant of the Feuerbachian ideal of love. Although the full realization of communism depended upon the existence of certain social conditions (about whose nature Hess at this stage was rather vague), communism as an *ideal* was already implicit in every altruistic tendency which stirred within the human breast. The historical development of society, he held, may be legitimately viewed as a result of the conflict of two great passions – *egoism*, manifested in individual selfassertion against others, and *love*, as expressed in all action inspired by the consciousness of the essential identity of the individual with mankind. Egoism or selfishness is the final source of all social oppression and exploitation. Cruelty, fraud and robbery, feudalism, chattel and wage slavery, pauperism and prostitution are possible only because men draw a circle around themselves and their nearest of kin, and focus attention so strongly upon the field of their immediate vision that they become indifferent, and ultimately blind, to the interests and the very existence of those who live beyond the line. Social institutions are such as to place a premium upon selfish behavior. And although this behavior is hedged in by rules of law imposed by the state, these rules themselves represent the organized selfishness of dominant groups. Capitalism or "the system of free competition is the last word; of egoism". It distorts and perverts every phase of culture – religion, art, education – by substituting for the ideals of the collectivity, private interest and private satisfaction as controlling factors.

Although the history of society has been the progressive replacement of the "egoism of one group by the egoism of others, it is significant that all groups come to power by professing allegiance to theoretical principles of love and humanity, freedom and equality. The more altruistic their declaration, the more consistent – as the history of the English and French bourgeoisie illustrates – their egoism. The fact, however, that in order to move great masses into action, vehement lip-service to the ideals of *love* and *humanity* is necessary indicates that "the real nature of man" recognizes that these ideals alone are ultimately valid and yearns for their fulfillment. But they can only be fulfilled when private property and the arbitrary power which its possession gives over other human beings, is abolished. "Communism is the law [*Lebensgesetz*] of love applied to social life." It is not enough to preach love to realize communism, as Feuerbach does; nor can it be brought about by preaching hate. Love must be organized into action; recognition of the identity of the real interest of all mankind must be carried over into every phase of personal and social life:

"You have been told that you cannot serve two masters at once – God and Mammon. But we tell you that you cannot serve either one of them, if you think and feel like *human* beings. *Love* one another, unite in spirit, and your hearts will be filled with that blessedness which you have so vainly sought for *outside* of yourselves, in God. *Organise*, unite in the real world, and by your deeds and works you will possess all the wealth, which you have so vainly sought, in *money*. So long as you do not strive to develop your own nature, so long as you strive to be not *human* but

superhuman and *inhuman* creatures, you will become inhuman, you will look down contemptuously upon human nature, whose real nature you do not recognize and treat 'the masses' as if they were a wild beast. The beast which you see in the people is in yourself." (*Ueber die Not in unserer Gesellschaft und deren Abhilfe*, **Sozialistische Aufsätze**, p. 149)

Hess left it unexplained how this belief in the essential unity of mankind could be reconciled with his characterization of those who did not share his belief. Perhaps it is too much to expect this of one whose first interest was not in social analysis – but, like the old Hebrew prophets, in social justice.

If anthropologically, communism was humanism, and ethically it was humanitarianism, it followed that the appeal to action would be framed not in terms of material interests but in terms of culture, creative activity, peace, honor, justice, and other ideal goods. The "true socialists" took the field against all those who pretended that the communist movement was exclusively or even primarily a movement of the proletariat, and who spoke as if its demands centered around the needs of the stomach. How could communists preach the ideal of classlessness and still appeal to *one* class against another? How could the ideal values of communism be regarded as the concern *only* of the proletariat when they really flowed from the real nature of man? Hess admitted, to be sure, that in France the movement was proletarian, but he explained this by saying that the French proletariat was communistic "not out of egoism but out of humanity". The proletariat becomes communistic out of love of mankind. But why should one, asks Hess, who out of love of mankind is already a communist, regard himself as a proletarian? And in fact there are communists who are not proletarians and there are proletarians who are not communists. All that one can say is that since the proletariat suffers most from the effects of organized egoism (which Hess identifies with capitalism) it is more likely than any other group to feel and understand the unity of mankind, and the necessity of establishing communism to realize it. Hess makes a point of correcting Lorenz von Stein, an Hegelian of the center, whose book, **Der Sozialismus und Kommunismus des heutigen Frankreich** (1845) introduced, so to speak, the theories of French socialism to the German public. Despite his reactionary tendencies, Stein had made some surprisingly realistic analyses of the French revolutionary movement. He had grasped the importance of the class struggle in French history and had distinguished between the "proletariat" as an historical category bound up with capitalism and the "poor" and "unfortunate" to be found in any society. [6] Hess insists that Stein has given a misleading account of communism.

"It is an error – and this error is due to the egoistic narrowness which cannot rise to a truly human outlook – yes, it is an error diligently spread by the reaction, and by Stein above all, that socialism develops only among the proletariat, and among the proletariat only as a question of fulfilling the needs of the stomach." (**Sozialistische Aufsätze**, p. 129)

Socialism is not a question of bread, although it may be that, too. It is in the first instance a question of man, of moral values, especially of human dignity. These values Hess formulates differently at different times. Sometimes it is simply *truth* which is the communist ideal; only under communism will social parasitism and the civilization of lies based on it disappear. Sometimes it is creative work in which effort and enjoyment will always be found together. Sometimes it is character or virtue, defined by Hess, as the "freedom to follow the law of one's own life" (and which dangerously approaches the ideal of bourgeois freedom). But through the entire scale of ethical variations developed by Hess, there sounds one fundamental theme: the social revolution presupposes a *moral* revolution.

4. "*True Socialism*" as *Reactionary Socialism*. Had the "true socialists" restricted themselves to declarations of brotherly love, they probably would have been remembered only as another Utopian socialist sect. But they prided themselves upon having advanced beyond their master, Feuerbach. If thinking flowers in action, then political thinking must concern itself in the most intimate way with the contemporary issues of politics. As has already been indicated, the German bourgeoisie was struggling against the nobility and bureaucracy for the democratic rights already enjoyed by the bourgeoisie in France and England. The "true socialists", posted on French

communist theory, knew that in a bourgeois democracy the proletariat was exploited even more openly than in an absolute monarchy, that the *formal* rights of press, assemblage, trial by jury, etc., could not be effectively exercised where glaring social inequalities prevailed. Speaking, then, for the proletariat – for the future of humanity – the “true socialists” repudiated the demands of the bourgeoisie, attacked their spokesmen as hypocrites, and succeeded in confusing the intellectual strata of the petty bourgeoisie who had regarded the change from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional republic as genuine social advance.

In this crusade against bourgeois liberalism the chief offender was not Moses Hess but Karl Grün and after him, Otto Lüning. But Hess was not without faults. He paraded an indifference to the political program of the democrats and was quick to accuse them of compromise, insincerity and cowardice. Even communists were suspect if their origins were bourgeois. The badge of real ethical purity was proletarian.

“Most communists,” he wrote, “who stem from the bourgeoisie go no further than general phrases and attempts at compromise [between the older order and the new]; it is only the proletariat which carries things to a decisive *break* with the existing order.” (**Rheinische Jahrbücher**, Vol. II, 1846, p. 65)

Hess maintained that the real cause of social distress was economic and to agitate for political reforms was therefore a waste of time. All governments, except revolutionary ones, were indifferent to the welfare of the proletariat. Addressing German liberals, he wrote:

“Has the King of Prussia shown less concern for the misery of the poorer classes than the French Assembly or the French kirig? So convinced are we by reflection upon the facts and upon the real causes of social distress that this is not so, that all liberal political strivings appear to us as immaterial, even as downright disgusting” (*förmlich zum Ekel geworden sind*).

It was Karl Grün, however, the man upon whom Marx poured out the vials of his wrath, who formulated the anti-liberal attitude of “true socialism” most sharply. The promise of a constitution which the King of Prussia had made in 1815 was long overdue. At every opportunity, the bourgeoisie reminded him, his counsellors, and his successor, of his unredeemed pledge. Every incident of domestic unrest was capitalized by bourgeois and liberal opinion to point out that constitutional safety-valves of popular resentment were better than none. The clamor for a constitution became particularly strong after the revolt of the Silesian weavers. It was in answer to this that Grün wrote:

“Who in Prussia wants a constitution? The liberals. Who are the liberals? People who sit within their four walls, and some *littérateurs* who either themselves own property or whose horizon is bounded by the wishes of the worthy factory owners. Does this handful of owners with their literary hacks constitute the people? No. Does the people desire a constitution? Not in its dreams ... Had the Silesian proletariat a consciousness ... it would protest against a constitution. The proletariat has no consciousness but we ... act in its name. We protest.” (**Ibid.**, Vol. I, pp. 98–100)

Lüning was more interested in awakening the proletariat to its great mission of social salvation than in drawing it into supporting the political demands of the bourgeoisie.

“There is only one way of making the proletariat conscious of its humanity, that is through the organization of education.” (**Dieses Buck gehört dem Volke** [a periodical], Vol. II, 1846, p. 102, quoted by Speier, **loc. cit.**, p. 126)

And so the “true socialists”, each in his own way, helped the reactionary nobility in its struggle to retain sole political supremacy in Germany.

5. *Communism and Nationalism*. Hess was the first socialist of his day to link up the question of nationalism with the theory of communism. Nationalism is of two varieties, just as internationalism is of two varieties. True nationalism, which may be defined as pride in the

distinctive character of local culture, has been perverted into the false nationalism of modern states by the institution of private property. So long as competition and war between individuals prevail within communities, it is inevitable that the same principles be applied by the organized groups which constitute states in their relations with each other. The struggle between nations takes more gruesome forms – wars, massacres, etc. – than the struggle between individuals within the nation, because there is no consciousness of common ties of local culture to diminish the cruelty towards others called forth by a conflict over the means of life. Just as it is necessary to find a rule to regulate the distribution of goods within the community in order to give each one an opportunity to develop his personality, so it is necessary to find a rule which will apply between nations so that each nationality will be able to develop its distinctive culture.

“The problem of the elimination of national hate is intimately bound up with the problem of egoistic competition. International war cannot cease until individual war, *competition*, ceases. All the problems, all the difficulties, all the contradictions which have arisen in this country, flow out of this fundamental question.” [7]

Commercial nationalism generally gives rise to a spurious renaissance of national culture. Everything becomes “national” and therefore the concern of the true patriot, e.g., “religion and a protective tariff for monopoly enterprises; freedom and cotton; mediaeval ruins and modern industry; gravestones and railroads.” In this way, national cultures which are the bearers of unique value, become claimants to total and exclusive value. They no longer are content to live peacefully side by side faithful to their own national genius and yet tolerant of others; they seek to impose their own culture upon others in the name of a militant and holy nationalism. They thereby destroy not only the unique value of other cultures but their own.

False nationalism breeds a false internationalism – cosmopolitanism. True internationalism recognizes the necessity of distinct cultures and nations. “But only the individual is real”, and nationality is the individuality of a people. It is no more possible for humanity to exist without particular peoples and nations than to exist without particular individuals.

Like most of his contemporaries Hess had a strong belief not only in the existence of national traits and character, but in their fixity. National traits may be an historical product, but the *kind* of development which is possible to each nation is determined by its essential nature. The German is essentially contemplative, the Frenchman passionate, and the Englishman practical. These traits will be found reflected in their revolutionary movements too. The German is a communist out of philosophy; the Frenchman, out of his strong feeling for justice; the Englishman, because of material interests. All three elements are necessary; but in the struggle for socialism, the Frenchman will give the signal for action. [8]

6. *Transition to Realism.* It would be a great injustice to Hess to close the exposition of his thought at this point. For his “true socialism” phase lasted only a few years. By 1847 Hess had already abandoned his appeal to humanity and the essential nature of man and had undertaken a study of political economy. His essay, *Die Folgen des Revolution des Proletariat*, no longer speaks of ideal presuppositions of communism but of material conditions, not in terms of the development of the spirit of humanity but of the development of productive forces. In this essay of Hess will be found, with a clarity and precision quite foreign to his other writings, the theory of the concentration and centralization of capital, the theory of increasing misery, the theory of overproduction to account for the periodicity of crises, the doctrine that the collapse of capitalism is inevitable, and the view that the development of revolutionary consciousness is a simple and direct outgrowth of economic distress – theories which were to receive classic formulation, together with a denunciation of “true socialism”, a few months later, in the **Communist Manifesto**. The change in tone and subject matter is so striking that mere paraphrase cannot convey it. I quote therefore some characteristic passages.

“A revolution of the proletariat presupposes before all things the existence of a proletariat – presupposes a struggle, not merely about abstract principles but about concrete and tangible interests, presupposes that the very existence of the great majority of the workers is threatened,

that these workers know who the enemy is they have to fight, and that they have the means in their own hands to achieve victory ... It remains to ask what must social relations be in order to produce uniform oppression of the workers as well as the instrument of their liberation? ... We have already indicated how free competition – in the last instance free-trade – makes wages equal. But before free competition can reach the highest phase of its development ... a certain series of economic facts must precede it ... Machines must be discovered, instruments of production must be perfected and multiplied, work must be subdivided, more must be produced than consumed, business crises must arise as a result of overproduction and threaten to ruin an entire country in case the obstacles which remain in the way of industry are not removed ... Once social relations have reached this revolutionary height, nothing can stop the proletarian revolution. All measures to revive and develop private interest are at last exhausted ... It is large industry which, as we saw, in the last instance provides, the means and conditions for the overthrow of the existing social order based upon private industry, private trade, and private property. It is large industry which creates a revolutionary class and unifies it against the ruling bourgeoisie. It is large industry which makes the proletariat subjectively conscious of the necessity of shaking off its yoke in that it gives the proletariat a consciousness of its position ... What fetters production today? The business crises? How do crises arise? Through overproduction. Why is more produced than can be consumed? Have, then, all the members of society more than enough of what they need? By no means, most of them lack the barest necessities of existence, not to speak of everything else which man needs for the development of his natural dispositions and capacities ... Why, then, this overproduction, this distress in the midst of plenty? Well we have seen: the more progress private industry makes, the more capital accumulates in private hands, the more those who are propertyless are compelled to sell their personal labor power [*Arbeitskräfte*] in order to secure the necessary means of life. The worker, however, who is compelled to sell himself or his labor power, becomes a commodity. Its value obeys the same economic laws as other commodities.” (**Sozialistische Aufsätze**, pp. 215–216)

It remains to ask where Hess derived these views, especially since in some of his later writings, the echoes of his earlier doctrines are still to be heard. There can be no question but that Hess read Ricardo and the Ricardian socialists in the light of Marx’s views as expressed in the **Anti-Proudhon**. It is a legitimate inference that these views were developed for Hess by Marx in their last period of collaboration. As we proceed to Marx’s criticism of Hess, it is necessary to bear constantly in mind that for all his dislike of the personal characters of Marx and Engels, after 1847 Hess regarded himself as a Marxist.

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Footnotes

1. Koigen’s **Zur Vorgeschichte des modernen philosophischen Sozialismus in Deutschland**, Berne, 1901, p. 149;

Hammacher’s *Zur Würdigung des wahren Sozialismus*, in Grünberg’s **Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der**

Arbeiterbewegung, Vol. I, p. 89ff.; Zlocisti’s **Moses Hess, der Vorkämpfer des Sozialismus und Zionismus**, Berlin, 1921, pp. 232ff. The whole of chapter IX should be read in this connection. Zlocisti’s biography of Hess is frankly partial towards its subject, but it contains a very lively account of Hess’ social and intellectual milieu. His discussion of the relation between Marx and Hess is vitiated by a stubborn misunderstanding of Marx on salient points. For example he is capable of writing the following:

“Although Hess placed himself decisively in the Marxian camp, one thing distinguished him from the ‘leader’ [Marx], viz., activity. For in the last analysis the Marxian conception excluded in *a priori fashion every organisation directed to the achievement of specific goals*. Everything develops out of the relations of production according to rigidly determined laws. It is this

development alone which undermines itself by its own laws; so that capitalism collapses of itself.” (p. 255)

- [2.](#) The first in **Aus dem literarischen Nachlass Marx-Engels**, Vol. 2, pp. 348, 390-392; the second: “It is objectively unjustifiable to describe Hess’ writings as ‘foul and enervating literature’,” (Marx’s characterization of “true socialism” in the **Communist Manifesto**) quoted by Zlocisti, **op. cit.**, p. 260; the third in **Friedrich Engels, Eine Biographie**, Vol. I, pp. 106ff.
- [3.](#) Riazanov: “*Up to a point*, the severe criticism of German or ‘true’ socialism contained in the **Manifesto** is a self-criticism ... of Marx’s own philosophical development.” (Explanatory notes to **Communist Manifesto**, Eng. tr. p. 213. Italics mine. To what point is however not indicated.) Lukacs: **Moses Hess und die Probleme in der Idealistischen Dialektik**, Leipzig 1926 (Sonderabdruck), pp. 27ff.
- [4.](#) “To these *true socialists* belong not only those who call themselves socialists *par excellence* but also the greater part of those literary men in Germany who have accepted the party name of communists. These last are, if that is possible, even worse than the true socialists.” (Engels, **loc. cit.**)
- [5.](#) **Anecdota ...**, Vol. I, 1843, p. 154; for more complete documentation of the Fichtean tendency among the Young Hegelians, see Speier, *Die Geschichts-philosophie Lassalles*, in **Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft**, Vol. 61, pp. 118ff.; as well as for a convincing interpretation of Lassalle as a “*wahre Sozialist*” (pp. 60ff.)
- [6.](#) As far as the mooted question of Stein’s influence on Marx is concerned, it is sufficient to point out that Stein prophesied that the existing proletariat would develop in Germany. Responsibility for the existence of the proletariat is laid at the door of the *Weltgeist*, Cf. **op. cit.**, p. 29.
- [7.](#) **Sozialistische Aufsätze**, p. 86. In his **Die europäische Triarchie** (1841) a work which brought him to public attention, Hess already proclaimed the necessity of a federated national unity of England, France and Germany, without interpreting nationalism as an expression of material egoistic interest.
- [8.](#) For an amusing contrast between the French and German type of revolutionist, cf. **Sozialistische Aufsätze**, pp. 156-157.

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